

April 1, 2016

California Department of Water Resources
Attn: Lauren Bisnett, Public Affairs Office
P.O. Box 942836
Sacramento, CA 94236

Subject: Comments on Groundwater Sustainability Plans and Alternatives Draft Emergency Regulations for Implementing the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

Ms. Bisnett:

This comment letter from the Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District (the District) pertains to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) Draft Emergency Regulations for Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSP) and Alternatives in accordance with the Department's efforts to implement the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). Through the leadership of the County of Mendocino and Mendocino County Water Agency, a local coalition of City and county water districts has been coordinated to take the first steps toward implementation of SGMA within the medium priority basin in the Ukiah Valley watershed. With the challenging deadline for comment submittal, we offer this comment letter in response to the draft Regulations and in support of the County's efforts toward forming our Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA).

Avoid Potential Conflicts with Existing Enforcement Agencies

Existing Federal and State laws relevant to pollution, species protections and, most importantly, water rights and priorities, have existing regulatory agencies and structures that should not be re-regulated by GSAs. It is also unclear how the Regulations interact with the SWRCB Frost Protection Regulation for the Russian River watershed. GSAs will need to coordinate with species and water regulators to ensure the adequate provision of information pertaining to these regulatory structures within GSPs. However, the draft Regulations should clearly state that SGMA does not hold GSAs responsible for minimum thresholds for pollutants, species protection or water rights and priorities.

Clarify Surface Water Interconnectivity and Depletion Enforcement Actions

Since there is not a clear understanding of surface water and groundwater boundaries, many riparian and appropriative rights holders in our basin and District could be potentially infringed by the draft Regulations requirement that minimum thresholds be set regarding depletion of interconnected surface water. How GSAs can achieve sustainability pertaining to depletions of interconnected surface water is not adequately addressed in the draft Regulations. Without clarification in the draft Regulations, GSAs could be potentially liable for enforcing the regulatory requirements of the State

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Water Resources Control Board or local water agencies.

Distinguish Regulations Based on Priority Level

As currently proposed, the Regulations make no distinction between medium, high, and very high priority basins with respect to the Administrative, Basin Setting, and Monitoring networks, nor with Representative monitoring requirements. We request the Department reduce these requirements with consideration toward setting basin priority requirements such that the level of effort to develop a GSP is more aligned with any threat to sustainability.

Support Partnerships for Local Solutions

SGMA acknowledges the greater effectiveness of local management of the State's groundwater basins. In this spirit, the language of the Act emphasizes the importance of DWR's support for local authority to provide sound, adaptive management solutions. The District supports this local-based approach to implementation of the draft Regulations. The expertise and flexibility available to local leaders helps ensure that GSPs are effective and likely to achieve the sustainability goals set forth in SGMA. The District supports the County of Mendocino in its efforts to use local expertise and judgment to find the appropriate actions to be contained in its GSP.

The opportunity to provide comments is appreciated. Questions to the District may be directed to Tamara Alaniz, General Manager at 707-462-5278.

Sincerely,

Tamara Alaniz, General Manager

Cc: Sarah Dukett, Mendocino County Water Agency

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